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C O N F I D E N T I A L ASMARA 000339

SIPDIS

DEPT FOR AF/E  
LONDON AND PARIS FOR AFRICA WATCHERS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 09/23/2019  
TAGS: [ECON](#) [ENRG](#) [PGOV](#) [ER](#)  
SUBJECT: HOW LONG WILL WE HAVE ELECTRICITY?

REF: A. ASMARA 177  
[1](#)B. 08 ASMARA 558

Classified By: CDA Melinda Tabler-Stone for reason 1.4(d).

[1](#)1. (C) SUMMARY: Eritrea's main power generators in Massawa have approximately 30 days left of vital lubricants. Without timely delivery of new lubricant, Eritrea could experience rolling brown outs or even massive black outs, according to Total's managing director, Mohammed Gbebo (protect). Although Total is cooperating with the Eritrean government (GSE) to ship the lubricants, it is very unlikely they will arrive before the remaining supply depletes. Gbebo named several ways in which the generators' operations could be extended by several days or weeks, however, these plans all hinged on the generator equipment being at a certain standard, which seems questionable given information Gbebo provided on the generators in June (ref A). End Summary.

[1](#)2. (C) Gbebo told Poloff he received a call September 15 from the power plant's manager that the lubricants necessary to run the generators would run out in 30 days. Total is the sole supplier for these lubricants (reftel B), purchasing them from Dubai. However, the GSE did not, until September 17, provide a guarantee from the Commercial Bank of Eritrea worth \$950,000 to purchase 480 drums. Gbebo estimated the lubricants would take 40-45 days to ship from Dubai, or possibly a few days less if the GSE can pony up an additional \$6,000 to pay for a faster ship.

[1](#)3. (C) Gbebo claimed there are several ways the plant could extend the remaining lubricant until the shipment arrives. For instance, the plant manager could use only 15 days worth of the remaining lubricant, and then "cut" the dirty lubricant with the last 15 days worth, adding another 10 days to the machine's life. The manager could also shut down one or two of the four generators, which would temporarily shut down any factories (i.e. soap, cement, the brewery), but would be enough to power homes. Another option would be to institute blackouts, say, every day from 2am-5am.

[1](#)4. (C) The power plant in Massawa is good quality, Gbebo continued, but it has not been properly maintained (ref A). The machinery might be too decrepit to use run on dirty lubricant or tolerate repeated shutdowns/startups. While Gbebo does not believe the country will experience a complete power failure in the near future, he did not see how the GSE will continue to get the hard currency it needs to purchase the lubricants and other needed accessories.

MCMULLEN